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ABSTRACT

This collection of articles on aspects of educational research, service, and leadership, are all written by members the Trenton (New Jersey) Area Chapter of Phi Delta Kappa. "Extra Year Programs: The K-1 Transition," by Richard Graja, reports on a study of 210 families regarding the Extra Year program, an opportunity for children to complete kindergarten and first grade in three years. In "Instructional Technology: The Future Is in Our Classrooms Today" Helen Pulaski Gross describes the need for using up-to-date technology in high school classrooms. In "Journal Keeping: Recording the Events of One's Personal and Professional Life" Claire Sheff Kohn discusses using journal writing as a way to enhance one's personal and professional life. Finally, in "Simulations: Bridging the Gap between the Classroom and Real Life" Theodore J. Gourby describes five programs which use a common instructional technique--simulation realities. (ND)

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VIEWPOINT

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Viewpoint publishes articles concerned with educational research, service and leadership for the benefit of our colleagues in elementary, secondary, adult and continuing education. Articles shared with our professional membership will include research, theoretical insights, information of practical interest and technological application.

All articles are written by members of the Trenton Area Chapter of Phi Delta Kappa.

– Marlene Fisher Gourley
Editor

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PHI DELTA KAPPA
TRENTON AREA CHAPTER

EXTRA YEAR PROGRAMS: THE K-1 TRANSITION

Dr. Richard Graja, Principal of the Lawrenceville Elementary School

INTRODUCTION

Extra Year programs are the subject of intense debate and scrutiny on a national level. Our professional journals and various national conventions have featured the debate surrounding this concept for many years and they are growing in intensity and number. This article describes a program evaluation that was conducted in the Lawrence Township Public Schools. The **Extra Year** program was in operation for ten school years and was eliminated as a result of this study.

The operational definition of an **Extra Year** program is one that provides children with the opportunity to complete kindergarten and first grade in three years. Our district provided two opportunities for a child to experience the extra year.

The first is a "pure" transitional class with a very specific curriculum guide, containing between ten and twenty children. All of these children were in kindergarten the previous year and will attend the regular first grade during their third year in school. During the third year the children are dispersed into all first grade classes to avoid any semblance of tracking.

A second delivery system for the extra year involves the children being in the same first grade with the same teacher for two years. A group of four to eight children is identified after attending kindergarten for their first year of school. They progress to first grade their second year in school and attend a class of 20 first grade students. After the second year, a majority of that class attends second grade and the group of four to eight remains in first grade with the same teacher but with a new group of 12 to 16 first graders. The teacher individualizes a two year program of education for the **Extra Year** children.

BACKGROUND

This article is based upon data received from a questionnaire that was distributed to 210 families who participated in the **Extra Year** program or were offered the opportunity to participate and decided not to participate in the program. In addition, all students who entered kindergarten in September of 1988, 1989, 1990, and 1991 were studied. Data regarding academic achievement and social and emotional growth was compiled. All of the children who participated in the study were administered the Gesell Readiness Test prior to entering kindergarten and the data reported was collected during the first semester of the 1994-95 school year. The Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT) is presently used as a standardized test in our school district.

The following data was collected from the parent survey of the children who attended the **Extra Year** program. The data is the total percentage of responses.

1. My overall evaluation of the pre-first program is:

Excellent	73%
Very Good	22%
Good	1%
Fair	3%
Poor	1%
My child did not attend pre first	0%

2. If this program were recommended to me for another of my children, I would (assuming class size, teacher and total program remains the same):

Select Level 4 and the extra year	83.5%
Go directly to first grade	2.5%
Undecided	14%
Repeat Kindergarten	0%

3. Based on my observations and feedback from the school related to social and emotional issues, I feel my child:

Feels comfortable with his/her present placement	92.5%
Is having some difficulty adjusting to school	4%
Is uncomfortable with the present placement	2.5%
I need more time to determine my answer	1%

4. Based on school performance and grades (academic issues) I feel my child:

Is very successful in the area of academics	56%
Is successful in the area of academics	40%
Is marginally successful in the area of academics	4%
Is not very successful in the area of academics	0%

5. I support the concept of **Extra Year** programs in the Lawrence Schools:

Very strong support	84%
Strong support	13%
Limited support	2%
No support at all	1%
No opinion	0%

6. I have seen the benefits of this program for my child:

Strongly agree	81%
Agree	16%
No opinion	2%
Disagree	1%
Strongly Disagree	0%
My child did not attend Level 4	0%

Parents of children who were offered the **Extra Year** program but did not attend provided the following responses to four of the six survey terms. They did not respond to questions 1 and 6.

1. If this program were recommended to me for another of my children I would (assuming class size, teacher and total program remains the same):

Select Level 4 and the extra year	32%
Go directly to first grade	21%
Undecided	42%
Repeat Kindergarten	5%

2. Based on my observations and feedback from the school related to social and emotional issues, I feel my child:

Feels comfortable with his/her present placement	94%
Is having some difficulty adjusting to school	6%
Is uncomfortable with the present placement	0%
I need more time to determine my answer	0%

3. Based on school performance and grades (academic issues) I feel my child:

Is very successful in the area of academics	44%
Is successful in the area of academics	56%
Is marginally successful in the area of academics	0%
Is not very successful in the area of academics	0%

4. I support the concept of **Extra Year** programs in the Lawrence Schools:

Very strong support	15%
Strong support	38%
Limited support	19%
No support at all	14%
No opinion	14%

In addition to the questionnaire, the research team analyzed test data and conducted Focus Groups with parents, children, teachers, and administrators. The results of the Focus Groups indicated a very strong support for the **Extra Year** program by parents, students, teachers, and administrators. (Specific data is available upon request.)

It was noted by the research team that many parents selected the **Extra Year** program because they thought that it would enhance the child's self-esteem. The parents who were offered the **Extra Year** program and did not attend frequently indicated that they did not allow their child to attend for fear that the child's self-esteem would be damaged.

A summary of test data gathered from the Metropolitan Achievement Tests on the children who entered kindergarten in September of 1988, revealed no significant difference among the groups in reading or math. Fourteen percent of the 1988 group, who tested developmentally young, required special education in either a full-time class or a part-time resource room. In contrast, 3% of the remaining students required special education placement.

There was a significant difference between the groups of 1989 kindergarten entrants for reading and math achievement. The children who refused the **Extra Year** program did significantly worse that the other group on the read-

ing test. The children who attended the Extra Year program did significantly worse on the math test.

In the 1990 kindergarten entrant group the test revealed no significant difference for reading or math achievement when all had completed grade four.

SUMMARY

The data reported in this article was shared, in all its detail, with the district study committee and a decision was made to eliminate the **Extra Year** program.

In my thirty years of service in education the **Extra Year** program is one of the most fascinating that I have encountered. It has been supported with great intensity by parents and educators and, at the same time, attacked because it damages a child's self-esteem and does not produce any academic gains for those who attend the **Extra Year** program.

A list of references is provided for additional reading on this topic. You may contact Dr. Richard Graja at the Lawrenceville Elementary School, 40 Craven Lane, Lawrenceville, NJ 08648, or call 609-530-8452, to obtain the specific details of the data described in this article.

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Special thanks to Robert Copeland, former Principal of the Benjamin Franklin School in Lawrence Township and Donna Porwacher, Ed.D., Child Psychologist in the Lawrence Schools for their help in researching this article.

INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY: THE FUTURE IS IN OUR CLASSROOMS TODAY

Helen Pulaski Gross, Reading Specialist
Council Rock High School in Newtown, Pennsylvania

This is the information age, a global community that is unlimited in access to worldwide information. This is a world that will one day include "paperless schools." This is also a world where the literacy levels are deficient for more than 90 million adults in the United States. (1993, United States Department of Education) and job security is virtually non-existent.

One hundred and eighty plus days per year, the youth of this country are required to attend or receive some type of formalized instruction. Public education today is in the stone age with regard to instructional technology. Local districts are not systematically recognizing the need to adequately prepare our youth to attain the skills that they must have to earn a living and be productive citizens in our ever growing and constantly changing technological society.

It is crucial that local districts recognize the need to develop and implement comprehensive policies that recognize this issue. Funding is often the key obstacle to planning or implementing extensive technology. Hence, many districts have a hodgepodge of technological pieces that do not quite fit into any type of effective, viable, comprehensive plan. Pro-action technological policies must include provisions for technology as integrative tools for learning and staff members as directive facilitators

Many districts now have strategic plans that "touch base" with the extensive use of technology. Many of these districts appear to have a pro-active "vision" yet end up with little because of a lack of board and community support. As a result, the educational institution ends up "pigeon-holing" the technological materials that are available. Some equipment and services only go to the administrative offices. Others are slated for the library-media center. The "discards" like the Commodores and the Apple IICs end up in the classrooms.

Several months ago, the author attended a high school parent orientation program in a relatively progressive, suburban school district. When a school official was questioned about the lack of computer labs in this secondary level school save for the computer programming lab, the response noted was that "computers were expensive pieces of equipment and the children would probably not take care of them." Ironically, this district's formalized strategic plan clearly addresses the objective of district-wide, accessible, instruction oriented technology.

In essence, what is presented to parents and the community as a union of

technology in the school district is often, in reality, an inequity of technological use. The classroom is, oftentimes, the last place to find a networked, computer system. Many computer labs, when available, are used for word processing or single program activities. Many school administrators perceive the one hour a week in a library-media center or in the "writing lab" as key instructional time that meets students' technological needs when, in actuality, it gives the contracted teacher their designated "prep" period.

Educational accountability and success is the focus of much speculation and is a target for many critics today. Education is at a crisis point. School boards, administration, staff, parents, community, and businesses must work together to ensure that technology equitably be integrated by administrative and teaching staff district-wide. Curricula must be revamped to use technology as a primary learning and management component.

In long range planning, lack of accessible technology will ultimately hurt the community. Students must be given the opportunity to keep pace with the rapid advances in technology and be prepared for the ever changing transformation of the workplace. In the long run, it is cost effective to adequately prepare to be self-sufficient, productive citizens.

It is crucial that the public carefully and responsibly examine the implementation and total use of technology in our local school districts and objectively determine if the district, in partnership with the community, is truly working to prepare its students for the 21st century. The public must also decide if there is district-wide accessibility to information technologies for teaching, learning and managing.

It is inconceivable that any business or workplace might not be using technology. Corporate America works on the premise that state of the art technology can often increase staff productivity and assure efficiency for the day to day operations of the company. In order to meet future needs, educational systems must parallel the corporate world in training and technological availability. Today's students are tomorrow's employees.

"Word processing labs" are only the readiness level of total technological accessibility. This is an ever changing, competitive world. It is crucial that communities and school districts examine available technology and funding resources. They must direct their energy and talents toward the integration of technology in instruction while enhancing overall technological skills and the incorporation of administrative/classroom technological management procedures. The future is NOW. The future IS today's students. The educational system as it is known today must be restructured to positively and productively impact on the global community of the "information age."

For more information on this topic, you may contact Ms. Gross at the Council Rock High School, 62 Swamp Road, Newtown, PA 18940.

JOURNAL KEEPING:
RECORDING THE EVENTS OF ONE'S PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

Dr. Claire Sheff Kohn
Superintendent, Lawrence Township Public Schools

Journal writing is a voyage into the interior.
~ Christine Baldwin

I remember reading *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* as a teenager. I was profoundly touched by Anne's story, told in her own words, of her two years of hiding in an attic during World War II in Nazi-occupied Holland. This experience, a young girl reading about another young girl, launched my intermittent, but lifelong interest in journal keeping.

Like other girls of my era, I received as a gift the requisite bound diary, complete with lock and key to prevent prying eyes from reading my personal thoughts. I recall pouring my mind and heart onto those pages, recounting the ups and downs of adolescent life. Though I never had the perseverance to make daily entries, going months and even years without writing a word, I have always turned to journal writing in times of transition. I have used journal writing as a release, to explore thoughts and feelings, and even as a goal-setting device. Without journal writing, I might never have completed my doctoral dissertation!

"One of the most significant attributes that makes humans human is their capacity for reflecting on and learning from their experiences."

~ David Hyerle

On a recent vacation to Disney World in Florida, I decided to attend the Disney Institute, an educational facility offering a variety of fun and interesting workshops. One of the sessions I signed up for was *Journal-keeping–Creating Magic with Your Own Story,* led by a Disney artist. Through directed writing activities, I experienced possibilities of journal keeping I had never imagined. I also learned from other participants that my uses of journal writing as self-expression and goal-setting were only two of many potential uses. They talked about journal writing as a means for leaving a legacy to their children, writing memoirs, recording creative ideas, amassing commemorative artifacts and much, much more. It seems foolish to me now, but it never occurred to me to do anything other than write in my journal. The workshop facilitator and other participants taught me that photos, cartoons, drawings, collages, memorabilia, or anything else of meaning could be wonderful stand-alones or accompaniments to prose, poetry, song lyrics or any other verbal expression in a journal or series of journals.

"We believe that human cognitive competence is better described in terms of a set of abilities, talents, or mental skills, which we call 'intelligences.'"

~ Howard Gardner

With developments in the cognitive sciences based on new information about the brain, this idea of multiple ways of expressing thoughts should not have come as the surprise it did. This mini-revelation prompted me to read such works as Tony Buzan's *The Mind Map Book* and Nancy Margulies' *Mapping Inner Space*. Recently, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development published *Visual Tools* by David Hyerle, a book about three types of visual tools to "help students and teachers construct knowledge, organize information, and communicate their learning with others." Venturing into the use of color, brainstorming webs, and thinking-process maps, I am expanding my linear brain. I even used a mind map in my journal to plan this article. As Hyerle says, "Maps are tools for displaying intellectual processes."

"Writing a diary builds on an everyday skill of many teachers . . . The research diary is one of the most important research methods and is very commonly used by teachers doing research."

~ Altrichter, Posch & Somekh

Having been a teacher of English, I recognize the advantages of journal keeping for students. I now realize how much more journaling can be than my original, limited view allowed. What is most exciting, however, are the expanded possibilities for teacher use, particularly as a research tool.

Our district, in partnership with Upper Freehold Regional (Allentown, Millstone, Plumsted), Washington Township, Notre Dame High School and Rider University, has launched a large-scale teacher research project as part of a **Goals 2000** grant. Many of the nearly 800 teachers in our sixteen collaborating schools are using journal keeping as a means for collecting data on the effectiveness of new initiatives. As Altrichter, Posch, and Somekh observe, "Research diaries draw on a tradition . . . Keeping a journal can facilitate observation, documentation, and reflection on current and past experiences..."

"Journal keeping may date back to the invention of paper."

~ Steiner and Phillips

As I use journal keeping myself and, now, in conjunction with my colleagues, it is quite satisfying to know that we are part of a long-held human tradition. Did you know that "journal keeping may date back to the invention of paper," or that "journals were found in the ruins of Pompeii and in the tombs of Egypt?" (Steinert and Phillips, 1991) We all know that many famous, creative people have kept journals, people such as Saint Augustine, Henry David Thoreau, Samuel Pepys, and Louisa May Alcott. Throughout history, they have been joined by thousands of ordinary people like us who have recorded the details of their day-to-day lives.

If you would like to discover or rediscover journal keeping to use with your students, colleagues, or just for yourself, please join us at our Trenton Chapter Phi Delta Kappa meeting on March 5, 1997. That evening's program will feature journal keeping as a means of recording the events of one's personal and professional life.

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SIMULATIONS: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN THE CLASSROOM AND REAL LIFE

Dr. Theodore J. Gourley, Associate Executive Director
Educational Information and Resource Center (EIRC)

The purpose of education is to prepare students to function in the real world as productive, independent adults. There may be some disagreement about the priority of the skills or abilities needed for this level of functioning but most authorities would agree that these skills include:

Basic Academic Skills - the three "Rs";
Thinking Skills - recall, critical and creative thinking, decision making;
Social Skills - communication, cooperation, organization; and
Content Knowledge - basic to advanced information in a variety of subjects.

The question for educators in schools today is how to best organize the learning environment and present instruction. The traditional view of the learning environment has been changing from that of thirty students in five rows in a room quietly doing their own work to thirty children in a room actively working in groups. Likewise, instruction has changed from teacher-centered to learner-centered. The quest is to make instruction more "real-world, hands-on," through the use of groups, projects, and student-directed learning since, in life, we must all be responsible for our own continual education.

CyberNews...wcw//com.com....Date October 9, 2010.
Headline..."Cosmic Collision,"...scientists fear collision between Earth and G-P Comet in 2012. World leaders have scheduled a summit meeting next month to plan for the possibility of a global disaster. Fortunately, the World Space Agency considered the possibility of a cosmic collision in designing the missile launch system on the new "Humanity" space station. However, even if the missiles dramatically reduce the force of the impact, the environmental damage could cause worldwide famine.

The above headline could be true, but fortunately has not yet occurred. It does invite the reader to consider a number of actions, scenarios and outcomes that involve very real-life, hands-on math, science, technology, economics and political science. This "Cosmic Collision" is part of the introduction to ***The Sky Is Falling***, one of several programs which employs the use of alternative methods and settings to traditional instruction. All of these programs use a simulation base. Through this vehicle, students engage in a variety of real life settings. Each program involves content knowledge and knowledge application; cooperation, communication and organization; and the ability to use diverse thinking skills including critical and creative problem solving, and decision making.

There are five programs which use a common instructional technique, *simulation realities*. All of these programs were developed by the author and

his colleagues at the Educational Information and Resource Center (EIRC), in Sewell, New Jersey. The instructional model involves:

Knowledge - required base of information in one or more of the content areas;
Application - the use of content information not only for factual recall but also for analyzing situations, solving problems, and making decisions;
Teamwork - cooperation with others to organize and manage the required tasks to make use of everyone's abilities; and
Distance Learning - the ability to learn from and work with remote resources including other learners.

In addition, each project uses a scenario, such as the "cosmic collision" to set the stage for a "learning adventure."

A number of questions were raised when development began on the first of these projects, ***Marsville.***

Would schools/teachers try the project?
Would the program be motivating to students?
Was the program able to be implemented as designed?
Would the program be effective in increasing student learning?
Would the program be accepted by the larger educational community - other teachers, administrators, parents, scholars, etc.?

Evaluating these concerns involved obtaining data from a sequence of measures both formal and informal. The results were as follows:

1. Teachers have been willing to try the project. The field test involved 21 New Jersey teachers in the Spring of 1991. Since then, the program has been used by over 600 teachers a year in 25 states, seven Canadian provinces, and schools in Sweden, Australia, England and New Zealand.

2. Student motivation was measured in two ways. First, observation at ***Marsville*** "Link-up" events. These were the culminating events at the end of the eight-week ***Marsville*** project. At this event, at least 100 students from a number of schools met to construct their village on Mars, "Marsville." The design of the village involved all of the students using distance learning activities involving fax machines and computers. Secondly, each student was given one of five questionnaires to complete which included the questions: "Did you like the program? Would you do it again? Would you recommend it to a friend?" These questionnaires were used at sites across the country. The results consistently showed high student endorsement of the program.

3. Implementation of a program design is of continual concern especially when the program contains numerous elements, some of which are more active and "fun" and others are more passive, academic and "boring." The "Link-up" is a performance based evaluation which requires students to demonstrate various elements of the program. Students from different schools must interact in a prescribed manner. At the initial New Jersey

"Link-up" and others since then, at least 90% of the students at an event were able to perform as required in all activities.

4. Increasing student learning is the major objective of any education program. The evaluation of the ***Marsville*** program included two efforts to determine the effect that the program had on student learning. At the conclusion of the "Link-up" the questionnaires given each student asked them to identify the content and processes they engaged in for the ***Marsville*** program. Regardless of where the project took place: New Jersey, Texas, Colorado or any other location, the results were the same. The students identified the specific contents: mathematics, science and language arts, the processes: teamwork, higher level thinking skills, and distance learning, used in the project. The students' results and other information were confirmed in teacher questionnaires.

   The second evaluation activity was aimed at determining the long term retention of information through the methods used compared with more traditional classroom instruction and organization. One year after participation in the project, several groups of students were given follow-up questionnaires. They were asked specific questions about the content and process of ***Marsville*** and other social studies and science activities studied the previous year. The data from this evaluation was inconclusive as to the comparative effect of long term knowledge gains through either technique used.

5. The acceptance of the program by the larger educational community was very positive. In addition to the two organizations involved in ***Marsville's*** initial development, EIRC and the Challenger Center for Space Science Education, other sponsors have included: The Canadian Space Agency, IBM, TRW, the Ontario Science Centre, and other corporations, museums, and universities throughout the United States, Canada, Sweden, New Zealand, and thousands of schools. In 1994, the program was named one of the five outstanding math/science/technology programs by the United States Secretary of Education.

The lessons of ***Marsville*** were repeated in 1992 with the creation of ***Planet X***. In this project seventh and eighth grade students learn proper experimental procedures and the meaning of valid and reliable data. The scenario this time involves a newly discovered planet which always travels in an orbit 180 degrees from Earth and thus it always has been hidden from view by the sun. Students simulate explorers from earth whose mission is to determine if the planet can easily be settled. Great care must be taken in gathering data on the planet's water, soil, and atmosphere since decisions made on invalid or unreliable information could be very costly. An evaluation similar to the one for ***Marsville*** was used with ***Planet X***. In 1995, ***Planet X*** was one of 50 United States math/science/technology programs to be cited as " Promising Practices "by the Eisenhower National Clearinghouse for Math and Science. It is currently being disseminated throughout the United States.

During the 1995-96 school year three new programs, including specific

software, were developed and field tested. This time the model was changed to increase the limits of the distance learning aspect of the programs. The first of these programs was the ***Sky Is Falling***, an integrated math/science/technology program designed for middle school students. It was developed as part of EIRC's involvement in the New Jersey Statewide Systemic Initiative, (SSI) and has involved over 50 teachers and their classes in its development. Each class in the program represents a different location on Earth. The task is to prepare for the "cosmic collision " by growing food to be used as part of a relief plan for the people in the impact area. This assignment requires the regular exchange of information with other program schools via e-mail. Classes exchange data on crop yields, maps of each other's locations, and plans for transporting needed food. Then on **"Impact Day "** the target site is hit and all the classes get on-line in a mad rush to determine damage, calculate resources and send relief before time runs out and the bell rings at the end of the day.

In addition to the ***Sky Is Falling*** project which uses a "cosmic collision" as part of the scenario, two other projects were introduced: ***The Electronic Model Congress (TEMC)*** and ***MarsNet***. It is these two projects which have stretched the limits of a distance learning community interacting on the same project. In the first year of operation ***TEMC*** created a network of 80 middle and high schools in 20 states. The simulation was based on the real-life interdependence of local politics and business. Student participants formed political and economic alliances with similar minded students in other schools, to advance the proposed legislation and financial welfare of their local community, their class. Each class is organized into a media , a polling, and a auditing company as well as a special interest group and a legislative office. Through their TEMC software program, classes throughout the country daily exchange e-mail, contracts, polls and other information.

In ***MarsNet,*** the community was 15 classes in schools in four countries. The objective was to use the resources of each country to create the life support systems which would be used on the future Mars settlement. In ***MarsNet*** the students were introduced to some basics in economics as each class traded for resources often with a class in a foreign country using a different monetary system.

In all three new programs, students regularly used their class computer and program software to interact on specific topics with distant classes. The programs named above are examples of the endless variety of ways in which the school can organize the learning environment and present instruction. As the world continues to change, the school will continually need to search and stretch to find new ways to prepare students to meet the changing "real world."

For additional information on these programs you may contact Dr. Gourley at EIRC, 606 Delsea Drive, Sewell, NJ 08080 or call (609) 582-7000.

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The "25th Anniversary Logo of the Trenton Area Chapter of Phi Delta Kappa," found on the cover of this issue, was designed by Drs. Herman and Blythe Hinitz, as co-editors of the Chapter Newsletter in 1995.

The "1995 Outstanding Newsletter Award Logo," found on the inside back cover of this issue, was presented to the Chapter on the basis of the 1994 - 1995 Newsletters, with Drs. Herman and Blythe Hinitz, as co-editors, after an international competition sponsored by Phi Delta Kappa.

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